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### Reframing Pictures: Reading the Art of Appropriation

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**LIVINGROOM**

SHERRIE LEVINE NEW YORK CITY 1977

**MOTHER**

SHERRIE LEVINE NEW YORK CITY 1977

**KITCHEN**

SHERRIE LEVINE NEW YORK CITY 1977

**BOY**

SHERRIE LEVINE NEW YORK CITY 1977

## Reframing *Pictures*: Reading the Art of Appropriation

### Appropriation

In 1977, Douglas Crimp, a young art historian, critic, editor, and curator, organized a “modest group show” titled *Pictures* at Artists Space in New York City.<sup>1</sup> While the exhibition itself was small in scale, showing five emerging artists’ works in a second-floor nonprofit gallery in Tribeca, it nonetheless became known as a seminal moment in the identification and theorization of a new approach to mak-

### Liz Linden

ing art, one that relied on semiotic theories about the nature of representation. This approach came to be called “appropriation.” Crimp brought together twenty-nine works in an extraordinary variety of media by Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo, and Philip Smith under the deceptively simple exhibition title *Pictures*. In part, it was precisely the conceptual challenge of unifying distinct artists’ practices under such a concise designation that enabled the idea to take hold.

The conceit was to take their disparate works (sound art on vinyl records, wall relief sculptures, oil paintings, and so on) and convincingly create a conceptual matrix that bound them so tightly together that they appeared naturally unified. Crimp’s essay in the *Pictures* exhibition catalogue specifies that “The work of the five artists in this exhibition, and that of many other young artists as well, seems to be largely free of references to the conventions of modernist art, and instead turn to those of other art forms more directly concerned with representation—film and photography, most particularly—and even to the most debased of our cultural conventions—television and picture newspapers.”<sup>2</sup> In other words, Crimp’s curatorial matrix was the idea of “representation.”

This initial framing of appropriation in Crimp’s essay, however, contains an ironic oversight; Crimp employs semiotics, which uses “language as the analytical paradigm for all other sign-systems,” to examine the work of artists directly concerned with representation, yet he ignores any text present in the artworks he discusses.<sup>3</sup> While text is clearly a form of representation, “since the structure of representation is identical with that of verbal language—a system of signs which always substitute for nonpresence,” writing is interestingly foreclosed from Crimp’s list of “art forms more directly concerned with representation” (i.e., “film,” “photography”) enumerated above.<sup>4</sup> Similarly the exemplary function of “television” and “picture newspapers” in the passage only further underscores how Crimp tends to overlook the visual presence of language, as both TV and print media consistently employ text to create the totality of their messages. Crimp’s writing instead conflates “imagery” with “representation,” both in his 1977 catalogue essay, and his returns to the exhibition in “*Pictures*,” in 1979, and “*The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism*,” in 1980, essays he published in *October*, the art theory journal he edited at the time. The three essays all describe artworks with text components, both texts directly appropriating language from specific settings and generic texts appropriating cultural stereotypes more broadly, and none consider those linguistic elements as representations in their own right, either for their unique aesthetic impact or their critical importance in the overall works, if they are even mentioned at all.

The most cursory look at appropriation’s history belies the early and ongoing importance of text in its operations, which had existed as an artistic approach long before this contemporary version of it became so ubiquitous in Western art.

**Sherrie Levine, *Untitled*, 1977**, twelve offset lithographs in loose-leaf artist’s book, ea. 11 x 8½ in. (27.9 x 21.6 cm). Collection of Patrick J. O’Connell (artwork © Sherrie Levine; photograph © The Metropolitan Museum of Art, provided by Art Resource, NY)

1. Douglas Crimp, *Diss-Co (a Fragment)* (New York: MoMA PS1, 2015), 22, rep. in Crimp, *Before Pictures* (Brooklyn: Dancing Foxes Press, and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 199.

2. Douglas Crimp, *Pictures*, exh. cat. (New York: Artists Space, 1977), 28.

3. Robert E. Innis, introduction to *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, ed. Innis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), viii.

4. Craig Owens, “‘Einstein on the Beach’: The Primacy of Metaphor,” *October* 4 (1977): 22.



For example, what has been called “postmodern” or “analytical” appropriation has been traditionally positioned as a direct inheritor of the mantle passed from the French Symbolist poets of the late nineteenth century to the Dada artists of the early twentieth century to the French Surrealists and the radical collage practices of John Heartfield and Kurt Schwitters.<sup>5</sup> Certainly the *mise-en-abyme* of André Gide, which Craig Owens, a peer of Crimp’s at *October*, would later appropriate himself, is itself a reflection of the earlier artistic practices of manifold or mirrored representations going back to the Renaissance and before.<sup>6</sup> Finally, the more immediate influence of conceptual art practices appropriating text for its paradigmatic or pedagogical potential, from the work of Joseph Kosuth to Lawrence Weiner to John Baldessari, is evident in the *Pictures* artists’ interest in alternately underscoring or undermining the authority of text.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the prominence of language in appropriations through art history, the works that became iconic of contemporary appropriation art’s exploration of semiotic models of representation are most often appropriations using photographs, including the stoic “Marlboro Man” of Richard Prince, the sober sharecroppers in Levine’s rephotography of Walker Evans’s works, and the Hitchcockian blondes of Cindy Sherman’s self-portraiture. This elision of postmodern appropriation with imagery, and with the mechanics of photography specifically, is largely attributed to Crimp’s “groundbreaking essay and exhibition . . . which defined the postmodern relationship to image production,” where Crimp asserted that the artworks that came to be defined by appropriation were all engaged in rethinking the political implications of how a “picture is not transparent to . . . a meaning.”<sup>8</sup> Yet a picture, meaning what appears within a given frame, be it a wooden frame around a canvas, the plastic shell of a television, the white margin of a photograph, or the casement of a window, does not always show us exclusively imagery; the picture in question often includes representations in the form of text, moving or static, carefully designed or determined by default, central or marginal, and so on. Thus while Crimp’s work on how images operate in appropriation has been hugely influential, it is problematic that his idiosyncratic curatorial frame for *Pictures* has been so widely applied that appropriation has become narrowly defined by its use of imagery and photography in particular, a narrowness that ultimately limits discourse about the practice, restricting not only what content it is recognized to engage but also what politics it is therefore perceived to express. Indeed the only photographs in the *Pictures* exhibition appeared in a single Goldstein work, a triptych using figures excised from photojournalism and presented on large blank backgrounds, while more than half of the *Pictures* works included text.

This essay looks again at some of the text visible in the *Pictures* artworks, in order to reassess both Crimp’s initial descriptions of these seminal appropriation works and the subsequent characterization of appropriative practices by Crimp and his peers at *October*. I conclude by reflecting on the political consequences of reframing appropriation in order to place text at the center of its critique of representation, briefly considering three contemporary artists’ practices that appropriate text for diverse ends. Thus while this essay opens with a retrospective look, it turns, in conclusion, to look forward at the contemporary moment, asking what we gain when we keep text also in view, in order to begin to reflect on what is at stake in these framings and reframings over time.

5. For “postmodern” appropriation, see Douglas Crimp, “Pictures,” *October* 8 (1979): 75; for “analytical” appropriation, see Johanna Burton, “Subject to Revision,” *Artforum* 43, no. 2. (2004): 260. For precursors, see Benjamin Buchloh, “Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art,” *Artforum* 21, no. 1 (1982): 43; and Johnson Okpaluba, “Appropriation Art: Fair Use or Foul?” in *Dear Images: Art, Copyright and Culture*, ed. Daniel McClean and Karsten Schubert (London: Ridinghouse and Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2002), 199.

6. Craig Owens, “Photography ‘En Abyme,’” *October* 5 (1978): 75.

7. See Douglas Eklund, *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 16–17; and Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, 1st ed. (Port Townsend, WA: Bay Press, 1985), 100.

8. The first quote is from Artists Space, “Artists Space Dialogues: Bettina Funcke and Douglas Crimp,” Wednesday, February 3, 7pm,” e-mailed press release, January 27, 2016; the second is from Crimp, *Pictures*, 14.

## Pictures

The works of the five artists included in the *Pictures* exhibition varied in just about every conceivable way. Levine's *Sons and Lovers* (1976–77), a suite of thirty-two tempera-on-graph-paper paintings depicting paired silhouetted profiles in alternating sizes, is titled after the 1913 D. H. Lawrence novel of the same name. The profiles include the recognizable busts of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and John F. Kennedy, and the heads of the anonymous figures of a woman, a Janus-form with male and female faces, a dog, and so forth. The drawings are mounted directly on the wall behind glass, unmatted and unframed, leaving the papers' "Hi-Art Li-Nup Bristol" branded margins exposed, a detail Crimp does not mention in his discussion of Levine's work, even as he refers to the "drama" produced by her "dumb repetition of images."<sup>9</sup> Yet it is precisely the papers' recurring grids and labels that form the unchanging textual frame of reference that underscores the iterative nature of the mute silhouettes and their progression of relationships. Levine's work, like Lawrence's, diagrams "a nearly-perfect melodrama: claustrophobic, suffocating, family-bound, with a set of psychologically predetermined and reenacted roles."<sup>10</sup> *Sons and Lovers* enacts this narrative through the serial, a seriality made explicit by the punctuating recurrence of "Hi-Art Li-Nup Bristol," throughout the family melodrama.

Crimp's curatorial essay also includes a discussion of Levine's "recently published" book, *Untitled* (1977), a loose-leaf folio consisting of twelve rearrangeable facing pages, each featuring one word. "On one set are printed the names of rooms in a house . . . while on the other are printed the names of family members. . . . Each of us, needless to say, has the story to complete that book."<sup>11</sup> Crimp again glosses over the aesthetic details of the physical work, in this case the stark black-on-white lithographic prints of the text, centered exactly on each of the pages, in a serified, capitalized typeface. Crimp also ignores that each print in the series appears on what looks like personalized stationery, with "SHERRIE LEVINE," "NEW YORK CITY," and "1977" printed centered at the foot of each page. These dual texts, the variable, generic places and people of the book's pages, and the repeated, specific identifier of the artist in her time and place, set up an assertion of mastery by the artist over every possible variant within this crucially all-encompassing narrative. In acknowledging the centrality of these specific textual details in this work, Levine becomes, as in her *Sons and Lovers* work, the omniscient narrator over all domestic dramas circumscribed by the series, a specificity that overwhelms the agency Crimp asserts for "each of us," and instead reassigns authorship, in all cases, to the artist.

Longo's four "picture objects" included in the exhibition consisted of cast aluminum wall reliefs.<sup>12</sup> Two of his sculptures appeared in dialogue with Hollywood narratives through their filmic titles and direct quotation from specific movie sources. For example, the *American Soldier* and the *Quiet Schoolboy* (1977) invokes a long chain of filmic associations both from its form (based on a still showing the assassination of the titular character of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1970 film *The American Soldier*) and from its textual or metatextual associations. Vera Dika writes,

While knowledge of Fassbinder's film is not necessary for the appreciation of Longo's *The American Soldier* and the *Quiet Schoolboy*, an understanding of it adds to the resonance of Longo's selection of images. . . . Fassbinder's *The American*

9. Crimp, *Pictures*, 18.

10. Howard Singerman, *Art History, after Sherrie Levine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 37–38.

11. Crimp, *Pictures*, 18.

12. *Ibid.*, 24.

*Soldier* was in some ways a “remake” of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Breathless*, as *Breathless* itself was a kind of “remake” of Howard Hawk’s *Scarface* or *The Big Sleep*. In representing the single image from the last sequence of *The American Soldier*, Longo encourages a series of references. The arching figure itself may recall Michel Poiccard, the lead character of *Breathless*, shot in the back at the end of the film, or, before that, countless American gangsters shot in cold blood and left to die on the city streets.<sup>13</sup>

This densely referential image points not only to Longo’s act of appropriation but also Hollywood’s own recycling of visual tropes and clichés, alluding to the narrative overlaps and appropriations inherent in the contemporary culture from which the Pictures artists emerged. This cinematic frame serves to further highlight the presence of language in Pictures as it returns the viewer’s attention to text in the form of the scripted narrative arc and the inherently linguistic mechanisms that define the movement of films.

But the sources Longo’s works appropriate are not exclusively cinematic, or even necessarily visual. Two of his works in the exhibition are titled after a 1976 Billy Joel pop song and the opening line of Thomas Pynchon’s 1973 novel *Gravity’s Rainbow*, respectively. “Say good-bye to Hollywood,” true measure, true star, in every living room of every house of every family across the nation (1977) cryptically presents what looks like a greyhound snoozing on an area rug, presented horizontally on a low plinth. *Opening Scene: “a screaming comes across the sky”* (1977) is a relief of a figure walking in a blank, flat void. While the titles of all artworks are of course texts in themselves, my argument about the frequent, overlooked presence of text in appropriation takes the text’s visual presence within the frame of the artwork as a qualifying criterion for consideration here; that said, this recurrent invocation of other texts outside the physical work but within its metatextual details, as in the cases of Levine and Longo, serves as a significant clue to the importance of language and text to the Pictures artists more generally.

Longo’s sculptures often emerged from his “multimedia theatrical pieces” and his sustained engagement with performance.<sup>14</sup> Around the time of *Pictures*, he was the curator of performance at The Kitchen, an alternative art space in downtown New York. Many of Longo’s source images for his sculptures originally appear or are recontextualized in movements and videos. Crimp notes of Longo’s performances, “Composed of a barrage of textual fragments and images, those works frustrated the ability to retain particular images that would provide a structure of meaning.”<sup>15</sup> Here Crimp’s repetition of “images” is telling, where the latter repetition could have more inclusively and accurately been replaced with “representations” in order to indicate the difficulty of creating meaning from both the fleeting images and the texts. By not acknowledging the texts’ role in meaning-creation in the latter phrase, Crimp’s summation elides the presence of text in the performances entirely, a conscious or subconscious sleight-of-hand that is symptomatic of the larger curatorial and critical blind spot to the importance of text in these early, indeed formative, appropriation artworks.

Smith’s five monumental paintings exhibited in *Pictures*, *Leap/Move*, *Back*, *Bring*, and *Spins*, each from 1977 and measuring one hundred by sixty-two inches, function similarly to *Sons and Lovers* for their oblique chain of references that keep the eye moving through each painting, and from painting to painting, with a series

13. Vera Dika, *The (Moving) Pictures Generation: The Cinematic Impulse in Downtown New York Art and Film* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 132.

14. Eklund, *Pictures Generation*, 82.

15. Crimp, *Pictures*, 24.



of similarly sized figures placed one after the other in rows crossing each panel. Their diagrammatic or, to borrow from Crimp, “pictographic” potential is underscored by the way serial associations are encouraged both within the work and by its installation: the individual images on each painting are presented at approximately the same size regardless of their real-world proportions.<sup>16</sup> The wall-size scale of the works along with their dark backgrounds imply something fundamentally communicative, like a cave painting or a chalkboard, while the inclusion of multiple paintings, grouped together along the wall, moves the eye from left to right not only across the painting, but also across the body of work. Crimp explains that “for Smith the logic of the picture is in its contiguity with other pictures.”<sup>17</sup> The inherent movement from one image to the next, and from one painting to another, encourages a semiotic or linguistic transfer that asks not what the paintings depict so much as what they mean.

Jack Goldstein’s works in the exhibition varied greatly in medium, ranging from eight short films made between 1975 and 1976 to four individual sound works on vinyl from 1977, along with a set of nine records from 1976, *Suite of 9*, and a triptych photographic work, *The Pull* (1976). While Goldstein used a range of media, the operation at work in each piece remained the same; Goldstein removed contextualizing information from around each central actor or activity to disorient the viewer from something potentially familiar, presenting the focus of each work against a blank background absent of other sensory input or detail, be it an image of an astronaut floating through an otherwise empty page, a film of a dog barking in front of a black backdrop, or the sounds of an earthquake whose scale and location cannot be determined by rumble alone. These decontextualized moments, when presented in time-based media, are heralded with a straightforward textual title card or media label and are thus rendered paradoxically iconic and unfamiliar, a destabilizing polarity that came to be seen as a hallmark of Goldstein’s appropriative artworks.

Presented variously as static works on a wall (for example, records hung in their sleeves) or as works to be viewed or heard on demand, Goldstein’s pieces in Crimp’s exhibition most directly challenged the notion of “pictures.” When his films weren’t being screened, *The Pull* (1976) was his sole work in the exhibition working explicitly with imagery. Indeed, Goldstein’s records were his dominant visual presence in the exhibition, and they were hung on the wall in the manner of a set of prints. The records stood out aesthetically both for their frequent color-coding by subject matter (green for the sound of falling trees, blue for a swimmer drowning, red and white marbled for a forest fire) and the simple, deadpan texts labeling each one. Alternating between an assertive, uppercase Helvetica type, in the case of Goldstein’s *Suite of 9*, and a more romantic, vernacular script mimicking the record design of a previous era, as in *The Murder* from 1977, Goldstein’s labels are suggestive and taunting, the texts coyly hinting at the invisible content of the records.<sup>18</sup>

While these labels figured prominently on Goldstein’s records in the exhibition, Crimp’s description of the physical presence of the work doesn’t even mention text, simply calling them “variously colored phonograph records.”<sup>19</sup> Yet these texts act as a supplement to the aural content of the artwork itself, a position that is not as neutral or benign as it might first appear. Quoting Jacques Derrida, Owens writes:

16. Ibid., 20.

17. Ibid., 24.

18. While *The Murder* is dated 1977 on the original works list from the *Pictures* exhibition, the record’s date is listed differently elsewhere, for example as 1972–76 in the records of the Smithsonian Institution, which provided the image and caption of this work for publication here. Differences in published information about works from the *Pictures* exhibition abound, from titles, to dates, to material descriptions, and for consistency’s sake, in the body of my text I have cited information about the works as found in the *Pictures* archival material wherever possible.

19. Ibid., 10.



**Jack Goldstein, *The Murder*, 1972–76**, sound recording on vinyl disk. ThomasLewallen Gallery records, 1970–1980, unidentified photographer (artwork © Estate of Jack Goldstein; photograph provided by Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution)

The supplement, however, is not a simple addition; it also supplants. Both an increment and a substitute, it plays a compensatory role: “It adds only to replace. It insinuates itself in the-place-of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void.” (The written supplement may extend the range of speech by prolonging it, but it also compensates for an absence—that of the speaker.) Hence the “danger” which the supplement comports within itself, the possibility of perversion: that its vicarious nature be overlooked, and that it be mistaken for the positivity to which it is only “super-added.”<sup>20</sup>

In the case of Goldstein’s work in the exhibition, the text on the records was part of their visually striking, informative, and ambiguous presence in the exhibition, alluding both to their potentialities and to the perverse deferral of gratification inherent in displaying them on the wall. Further, by recognizing these texts as both being and describing the records’ content, the texts enact, exactly, the critique of representation that Crimp claims for appropriation itself.

The seven print works exhibited by Troy Brauntuch vary in their content, although they are related through their shared deployment of the mysterious as a Trojan horse for the critical. Brauntuch’s work attracts the viewer with obscure content that perplexes and intrigues, then reveals only through secondary sources (if ever) the political implications of the mystery elements, potentially changing

20. Craig Owens, “Detachment from the ‘Parergon,’” *October* 9 (1979): 43.

the overall significance of the work. Brauntuch's prints in the exhibition are unified visually through their minimal design (expanses of blank page, solid-colored backgrounds, text and image elements placed strategically within an otherwise empty field) and their media (the works all employed common, commercially available print techniques such as lithography, Cromalin printing, C-prints, and rubber stamping).

Series similarly pervade Brauntuch's work in the exhibition, with his frequent use of the diptych or triptych structure reinforcing the linguistic function of the work. Presenting many of his images serially as a progression of information highlighting a narrative drive through a body of work, this directionality forces the viewer to "read" the work, even when the images lack any visible text. Further, a number of Brauntuch's works in the *Pictures* exhibition employ text to verbally enforce the serial. For example, his *Play, Fame, Song* (1977) is a triptych of prints presenting white line drawings of simple architectural figures on black backgrounds, underscored by a word from the title. The word "play" is presented under a five-stroke drawing of a swing and "fame" captions a simple drawing of a column base and pedestal, while "song" is paired with a minimally described spotlight illuminating an empty stage. Thus the words "play," "fame," and "song" activate the drawings as symbols of the words; without the incorporation of text into these works, the austerity of the drawings would perhaps indicate that they are unfinished sketches or a drafting exercise. In other words, the addition of text in these prints designates the images as signs, like the text itself—claiming them as equivalents in the representational stakes. The prints are mounted flat, leaning slightly against the wall on small white shelves, which further heightens their pedagogical aspect as they look like teaching tools, small blackboards with chalk trays below.

Crimp's writing about Brauntuch's *Golden Distance* (1976) serves as a case study in how the curator overlooks the important role of text in these artworks. In his curatorial essay, Crimp discusses *Golden Distance*, a work that is reproduced as a two-page spread in the *Pictures* catalogue. Each black panel depicts the same appropriated circular image of the back of a woman's head (an image that repeats in another Brauntuch print included in the exhibition), one image in white and the other overlaid with a transparent gold disk. The panel with the woman in gold also includes a white text in a formal script, reading "Whispers around a woman." As one of only two changes to an otherwise serial image, the text is no doubt an important part of the movement of this work, yet Crimp refers to it as a "caption" that "seems only to reinforce the inaccessibility of the photograph."<sup>21</sup> In other words, Crimp describes the text as a simple complement to the more important element of the photographs.

Yet when one looks at the work, the text is in fact the salient element, flagging the move from seriality to specificity. The image changes register through the addition of a gold veil, or lens, while the text moves from absence to presence itself. Does the phrase refer to the gold zone's sudden appearance around this woman, or does the concurrence of the gold filter and the explicatory text simply draw our attention to something present but invisible to us in the first image, serving a diagrammatic function for the left-hand panel, bringing our attention to the presence of "whispers" all along? Also, because these are Cromalin prints, the white areas of the work are not actually printed but result from negative space

21. Crimp, *Pictures*, 10.



**Troy Brauntuch, *Golden Distance*, 1976**, set of 2 Cromalin prints, unframed: ea. 17 x 13 in. (43.2 x 33 cm) (artwork © Troy Brauntuch; photograph provided by Petzel, New York)

22. It is instructive to note this “purely informational” assumption about the text being reproduced over time because it underscores how influential Douglas Crimp’s original characterizations of the *Pictures* works continue to be. The curator Douglas Eklund, in his 2009 discussion of *Golden Distance* in *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984* catalogue, likens the phrase to “the subtitles of a foreign film,” another simile that fails to account for the visual qualities of the work itself. Eklund, *Pictures Generation*, 101.

left on black and gold transparencies; in other words, the white one sees in looking at the print is the carrier paper itself. The mirroring of the white image on the left with the white text on the right now reinscribes the space of the diptych as the space of a book, with facing pages opened to us. The text formally enforces this analogy, reading naturally from left to right, mirroring our larger reading of the diptych itself. Further, the text is no simple caption, but also a vital formal element in the larger image. This is made clear not only because of its unorthodox placement on the page (captions generally rest below a work, so that the viewer encounters them after the image), but also due to its typographic identity (captions are generally sans serif for clarity, with any terminal or shoulder strokes weighted for legibility).<sup>22</sup>

Hanging high above the golden woman on the page, floating like a cloud or a halo, the text visually alludes to that other fundamental shift by the artist, inscribing the figure of the woman in the golden circle; she is also flattened into the circular, perpendicular ring of halos as depicted in the sacred art of Russian Orthodoxy, yet unlike Russian icons, she is viewed from behind. Is this a woman abdicating sainthood or is she a saint repudiating the viewer? Is there an air of sacrilege about these whispers? These are readings made possible by the text, without which the prints are merely an exercise in repetition.



## Revision

Of course, it is important to acknowledge that when Crimp curated the 1977 exhibition at Artists Space and called it *Pictures*, he clearly signaled his priorities to the world. In the introduction to his 1979 “Pictures” essay, he stated, “In choosing the word pictures for this show, I hoped to convey not only the work’s most salient characteristic—recognizable images—but also and importantly the ambiguities it sustains.”<sup>23</sup> At issue here is not the necessary delimitation of Crimp’s interest in how images signify, but that the incomplete way in which representation was defined in this circumscribed context has been married with what has since become known as appropriation art. As text in appropriation art has continued to be disregarded over time, its absence has resulted in a contemporary understanding of appropriation as narrowly concerned with image-as-sign, to the exclusion of the linguistic (and other) signs also appearing within an artwork’s frame. Given that Crimp defined appropriation as a practice invested in questioning the limits of representation and “structures of signification,” the uncritical art-historical inheritance of representation as image is remarkable.<sup>24</sup>

Further, the critical investment in applying the lessons of semiotics to the operations of appropriation makes it particularly ironic that the role of language within the frame of the artworks was not considered, either at the time or in later writing. Ferdinand de Saussure defined semiotics, in part, as an engagement of meaning in text and language in the field of linguistics as well as society at large, and Crimp’s 1977 essay cites not only Saussure, whose groundbreaking *Course in General Linguistics* popularized the semiotic study of language, but also Roman Jakobson, whose own work applied semiotics to study the power of poetic language.<sup>25</sup> However Crimp’s main influence, semiotically speaking, was Roland Barthes, as it was Barthes who compellingly claimed that “signifying media” of all sorts could be analyzed using semiotic tools, deconstructing everything from film stills to fashion to, notably, an advertisement for prepared Italian foods.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, it is in Barthes’s essay “Rhetoric of the Image,” first published in 1964 and published in translation in 1977, that one possible precursor to Crimp’s oversights can be seen, as in this text Barthes himself fails to acknowledge the affective, aesthetic impact of text and typography, much as Crimp fails to address the informational, affective, or aesthetic impact of text in the individual artworks he writes about. In the essay, Barthes lays out a framework for the analysis of a Panzani advertisement for packaged pastas and sauces, describing the three expressive elements of the ad as “the linguistic message, the denoted image, and the connoted image.”<sup>27</sup> Barthes therefore allows the ad’s photograph to signify in at least two ways with both a “perceptual” and “cultural” message, thus as an illustration of the products available and also of “Italianicity” itself, while the text of the advertisement is treated as pure message, without aesthetic significance or meaning to leaven its literal one, despite the stylistic and typographic-historical evocations that equally accrue in its visual identity.<sup>28</sup>

Crimp shared this investment in Barthes’s work on semiotics with his colleagues at *October*. His peers at the journal, notably Rosalind Krauss, his professor at CUNY who cofounded *October* with Annette Michelson and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe in 1976, and Owens, another of Krauss’s students, identified Crimp’s work on appropriation as a noteworthy development in the theorization of postmodern

23. Crimp, “Pictures,” 75.

24. *Ibid.*, 87.

25. Ferdinand de Saussure, “The Linguistic Sign,” in *Semiotics: An Introductory Anthology*, 35.

26. Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 9.

27. Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 37.

28. *Ibid.*, 36 and 34.

practice and quickly incorporated his insights from *Pictures* into their own writings.<sup>29</sup> Krauss and Owens, like Crimp, were also influenced by the great influx of newly translated writing by French cultural theorists and philosophers including Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, and Jean Baudrillard, along with the work of earlier writers whose thinking was important to this new generation of French theorists, including Saussure, Jakobson, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Lacan, and Sigmund Freud.<sup>30</sup> In short, *October*'s writers shared a heavily footnoted, intellectually ambitious style that deliberately pointed away from the Greenbergian concerns of modernism that had dominated American art criticism in the 1960s in favor of postmodern, poststructuralist approaches to art criticism. Their common set of references inadvertently ensured that they were often writing in dialogue with each other, with both Krauss and Owens citing Crimp's writings on appropriation, and he theirs, in some cases in the same issue of *October*.<sup>31</sup> The problem with viewing appropriation through the lens of this contemporaneous, interconnected body of writing is that while Crimp's stated positions may be reinforced, contested, or questioned, his omissions remained absent from view, inscribed, at most, in the negative space of the established arguments; despite, or perhaps because of, this densely worked critical terrain, Crimp's specific blind spot to the centrality of text in the appropriations of the *Pictures* artists went unacknowledged, even while Krauss and Owens wrote about text, and appropriation, in their own work at the time.

For example, in 1982 Krauss wrote persuasively about the contemporary critical bias toward celebrating photography over text, in her essay "When Words Fail." This text addresses "the invasion of the visual by the textual" in the photography of Weimar Germany, citing the profusion of photographic self-portraits of the era depicting only the subject's hand with a writing implement and a handwritten page as an occasion to reconsider "misconceptions that operate at the very heart of present critical discourse on photography."<sup>32</sup> However, despite Krauss's acknowledgement that "capturing and holding the transient experience, recording the present and storing it up against the future," is not unique to photography but in fact a representational quality shared with writing, her insights here are necessarily applied to the photography of the 1920s and 1930s while her call to look at contemporary "misconceptions" about photography went unanswered.<sup>33</sup> Krauss also wrote about the importance of appropriated text specifically in her 1980 essay "Poststructuralism and the 'Paraliterary,'" which was originally delivered as remarks at a symposium on contemporary criticism. The essay addresses the shifts in criticism wrought by authors such as Derrida and Barthes who created "a kind of paraliterature," which "is the space of debate, quotation, partisanship, betrayal, reconciliation," pointing to the critical import of engaging with such appropriated material that is "always already-known."<sup>34</sup> Krauss's identification here of the contemporary application of appropriation to critical texts, as well as her sensitivity to the "talking picture," meaning the photograph depicting text, illustrates some of her discernment for the critical role of text appearing within a given frame.

Owens's writing frequently addresses language in the context of conceptual, postmodern, and feminist art. His 1979 essay "Earthwords," for example, demonstrates his canny recognition of the specific importance of text to postmodern art, writing that the artist Robert Smithson's recourse to writing "transformed the visual field into a textual one [and] represents one of the most significant aes-

29. Recognizing the early influence of *Pictures*, Krauss also encouraged Crimp to continue his own work on the subject. Crimp credits her as an impetus for publishing his second "Pictures" essay in 1979, explaining that Krauss, "suggested to me that we republish the catalogue essay [in *October*], since there was a certain amount of buzz about the *Pictures* show, and artists associated with it were beginning to garner attention. But a year after the show, I was no longer happy with what I'd written," so he drafted a new version of the essay. Crimp, *Before Pictures*, 254.

30. See Eklund, *Pictures Generation*, 17; and Irving Sandler, *Art of the Postmodern Era: From the Late 1960s to the Early 1990s* (New York: Icon Editions, 1996), 332.

31. *October* 13 provides an interesting case in point, because not only do Crimp, Owens, and Krauss all have essays on postmodernism and appropriation in the issue, but Crimp and Owens each cite the same Krauss essay on Robert Rauschenberg in their respective texts. Further, Owens also cites Crimp's essay, "On the Museum's Ruins," published concurrently with his own in the same issue, *October* 13, pointing to how immediately interrelated the *October* writers' arguments were. Douglas Crimp, "On the Museum's Ruins," *October* 13 (1980): 41–57; Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism, Part 2," *ibid.*, 36–40; Rosalind Krauss, "Poststructuralism and the 'Paraliterary,'" *ibid.*, 59–80.

32. Rosalind Krauss, "When Words Fail," *October* 22 (1982): 100 and 92.

33. *Ibid.*, 95.

34. Krauss, "Poststructuralism," 37 and 39.



thetic ‘events’ of our decade.”<sup>35</sup> Further, Owens’s brief essay from 1982, “Sherrie Levine at A&M Artworks,” explicitly denies the characterization of Levine as “primarily . . . an appropriator of images,” taking pains to establish the great variety of media she adopts in her practice.<sup>36</sup> Finally, Owens makes explicit the links between feminist art and textual explorations of representation in his 1983 essay “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism.” Here he writes specifically about appropriated text in the work of Barbara Kruger, Martha Rosler, and others, notably flagging Levine and Louise Lawler’s collaboration, titled *A Picture Is No Substitute for Anything*, as “an unequivocal critique of representation as traditionally defined.”<sup>37</sup> In this essay Owens hails the role of critical writing as art for a number of feminist artists, who “often regard critical or theoretical writing as an important arena of strategic intervention,” an insight that underscores the political stakes of critical writing as art practice both in the early 1980s and today.<sup>38</sup>

Owens should therefore be credited for remarkable perceptiveness to the role of text in postmodern practices, as well as diversifying the media of appropriation more generally, although these examples are tempered by instances where his own valorization of images dominates any consideration for the critical role of language in a work. This is evident in Owens’s 1984 essay on Kruger, “The Medusa Effect, or, The Specular Ruse,” where Owens’s image bias is present from the outset. Owens opens his essay, “Barbara Kruger propositions us with commonplaces, stereotypes. Juxtaposing figures and figures of speech—laconic texts superimposed on found images (Kruger does not compose these photographs herself)—she works to expose what Roland Barthes called ‘the rhetoric of the image’: those tactics whereby photographs impose their messages upon us, hammer them home.”<sup>39</sup> By Owens’s admission, Kruger’s practice engages clichés both visual and textual (“figures” and “figures of speech”) whose stereotypes she appropriates to examine and undermine. Despite this, Owens still frames her practice as concerned with the operations of “photographs,” a characterization that fails to acknowledge the reciprocal elements of her critique, in which the images are equally called on to expose the stereotypes and assumptions inherent in the texts. While other writers, notably Benjamin Buchloh and Hal Foster, turned to appropriation in their own much-anthologized articles of the early 1980s, sometimes specifically attending to the operations of text in the practices of artists such as Dara Birnbaum, Jenny Holzer, Rosler, and Kruger, this essay takes as its starting point the idea that such artists’ engagement with language was not an evolution of appropriation, but rather the matrix from which it emerged.

## Reframing

What might we think of as iconic of appropriation now if, instead of associating it so closely with image-based or photographic practices, we focused on appropriation’s use of text, placing it squarely in the center of our view? What orthodoxies of art history and practice could be undone? Appropriation, as theorized by Crimp as an inquiry into how images signify, has been widely understood as operating at the “crossing of the feminist critique of patriarchy and the postmodernist critique of representation.”<sup>40</sup> This framing of appropriation as an ocular-aesthetic stalemate with the gaze has resulted in the practice being politically pigeonholed as the domain of “theoretical girls” and “women artists . . . of a specific position

35. Craig Owens, “Earthwords,” *October* 10 (1979): 128.

36. Craig Owens, “Sherrie Levine at A&M Artworks,” *Art in America* 70 (Summer 1982): 148.

37. Craig Owens, “The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism,” in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (1983; New York: New Press, 2002), 84.

38. *Ibid.*, 73.

39. Craig Owens, “The Medusa Effect, or, The Specular Ruse” (1984), in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 191.

40. Owens, “Discourse,” 68.

of New York conceptual art,” orthodoxies of art history that persist despite much evidence pointing to appropriation’s wider engagement with representations of power, manifesting in various formats, text, image, or otherwise.<sup>41</sup>

This broader application of appropriation necessarily allows for a greater diversity of hegemonies to be addressed and political positions to be voiced, because the practice can explore what is at stake in more types of representations. In an effort to reconsider what might more accurately be thought of as representative of appropriation today, I will look at a few contemporary artists’ works that appropriate text in ways that underscore or parallel the other operations at work in their practices, namely works by Rirkrit Tiravanija, Haim Steinbach, and Anne Collier. That these artists’ oeuvres are more often considered iconic of other processes they employ highlights just how limited the discourse about appropriation continues to be, despite its ubiquity. While any number of artists use appropriated text for distinct, and distinctly contemporary, political ends, I have chosen these three specifically because the obvious dissimilarity of their works provides productively far-flung coordinates for plotting a new, expanded map of appropriation’s activities.

Tiravanija is perhaps best known as the standard-bearer for relational aesthetics, in part due to his work appearing on the cover of the first editions of Nicholas Bourriaud’s influential book of the same name. *Relational Aesthetics*, devoted to participatory, social-art practices, uses a number of Tiravanija’s works involving the public cooking and eating of food to bolster Bourriaud’s arguments about the “convivial” nature of such interactive art practices.<sup>42</sup> However, the “generosity” that is frequently ascribed to Tiravanija’s work tends to overshadow the more critical aspect of his practice, which uses appropriation to indirectly point to unacknowledged power dynamics.<sup>43</sup> For example, his *Untitled (pad thai)* (1990) saw the artist’s work, installed in the smaller project space of the Paula Allen Gallery in New York, mistaken for catering in support of the main exhibition, in the type of politically charged misreading that the artist’s work often cultivates.<sup>44</sup> The critic Raimar Stange points to this subversive, postcolonial critique inherent in his work, writing that Tiravanija “has become famous as a ‘cooking artist’—a misunderstanding that has almost concealed the real questions raised by his work for the past twenty years . . . [which] read Western culture against the cultural attitudes of his homeland, Thailand.”<sup>45</sup> Indeed it is appropriation, in this case transplanting Thai cooking into the gallery, that effectively sets the stage for Tiravanija’s indirect political critique, one that depends on the viewers’ assumptions, rather than the artist’s voice, to become clear.

But Tiravanija’s two- and three-dimensional works also rely on appropriation, and often text, from newspaper headlines to popular slogans, to indirectly express unsettling political realities. For example, his 2003 text painting *untitled (less oil more courage)*, which the artist first exhibited in that year’s Venice Biennale, caused a stir from its initial installation both for the artist’s unpredicted swerve into painting and for the perceived bluntness of his political statement. But most critics at that time seemed unaware that the titular phrase painted on the canvas was, in fact, appropriated from the notes of the painter Peter Cain. For example, Kirsty Bell writing in *frieze* called it, “a small white canvas with the words ‘Less Oil, More Courage’ painted in thick black letters. Perhaps this is a joke about painting, but maybe it’s a clear and mild-mannered protest that brings a fragment

41. For “theoretical girls,” see Jeff Wall in conversation with Dan Graham, date unknown, quoted in Eklund, *Pictures Generation*, 144. For “women artists,” see Douglas Eklund, gallery talk at *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984*, April 20, 2009, video by James Kalm, *The Pictures Generation, 1974–1984 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, video, 10:05, at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftvSK-nxgWQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftvSK-nxgWQ), as of October 20, 2015.

42. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002), 26.

43. For “generosity,” see Joshua Decter, “Review: Rirkrit Tiravanija, Gavin Brown’s Enterprise,” *Artforum*, May 2011, 282.

44. Rirkrit Tiravanija, e-mail to author, January 11, 2016.

45. Raimar Stange, “Interview Rirkrit Tiravanija,” *Spike Art Quarterly* 31 (Spring 2012), at [www.spikeartmagazine.com/en/articles/interview-rirkrit-tiravanija](http://www.spikeartmagazine.com/en/articles/interview-rirkrit-tiravanija), as of December 15, 2015.



**Rirkrit Tiravanija, *untitled 2007 (less oil more courage)*, 2007**, lightboxes, dimensions variable, installation view, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, 2007 (artwork © Rirkrit Tiravanija; photograph provided by Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York/Rome)

of greater reality back into the spectacle of the Grand Show.”<sup>46</sup> Yet the commentary was not as clear as Bell imagined, since the politics inherent in the work were articulated indirectly at best, Tiravanija ghostwritten by Cain, employing exactly the kind of authorial relativism ascribed to the appropriations of Levine, Brauntuch, and others of the *Pictures* generation. Tiravanija later appropriated his own appropriation in a 2007 remake of the original painting, and in subsequent print works and installations where the Cain reference was strategically deployed. For example, in the context of the 2007 Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates, where the text was inevitably overdetermined by the geopolitics of oil, the ecological message of Tiravanija’s light-box street signs displaying the phrase operated precisely because of the acknowledgement in the exhibition documentation that the statement was not the artist’s. In this instance, the text’s appropriation added a depth of reference that removed Tiravanija’s work from the realm of propaganda and returned it to the domain of art.

Steinbach, a contemporary of the *Pictures* artists whose work examines cultural practices of collection and display, is renowned for presenting carefully

46. Kirsty Bell, “50th Venice Biennale,” *Frieze* 77 (September 2003), at [www.frieze.com/issue/review/kirsty\\_bell/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/kirsty_bell/), as of December 18, 2015.



selected objects in dialogue with each other, arranged on shelves of his own design. However, Steinbach's interest in the formal and cultural significance of the materials with which we surround ourselves extends to his frequent appropriation and re-presentation of found words and phrases (ranging from ad copy to literature) as wall texts, in works he has been exhibiting since the 1980s. Rendered in the exact typography and layout of the original sources, then re-scaled to suit the site, Steinbach's wall texts recontextualize the visual chatter that forms our increasingly media-saturated, text-rich environment, asserting that, much like the beloved, obscure, or banal objects on his shelves, these phrases are a profound register of the contemporary landscapes of our creation. When recontextualized, they operate in the same iconic-yet-unfamiliar mode Crimp initially identified as the appropriative. Steinbach's wall texts, whether installed at heroic or diminutive sizes in architectural space, not only register these plagiarized phrases as formal objects in their own right, but also present them as freely circulating cultural currency in the same manner as his displayed objects.

For example, take Steinbach's *bauhaus* (2014), introduced as a site-specific work at the Kunsthalle Zurich iteration of his 2013–14 traveling exhibition *once again the world is flat*. In context, *bauhaus* evokes a long chain of references from its literal translation from German as “construction house,” to the so-named art school of the 1920s, to the identically named German hardware store chain of today. Looking at the wall text through the lens of globalization, the work's references are allowed to read interchangeably, with the traditional hierarchy of cultural values upended when presented in Steinbach's overall exhibition, its reading equally influenced by the exposed building materials of the installation (sheet-rock, studs, wallpaper strips, and more), the enveloping art-historical frame of the museum, and the rich typographic legacy of Switzerland itself. The curators Tom Eccles, Beatrix Ruf, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Julia Peyton-Jones allude to the multivalent readings of Steinbach's installation: “A prominent feature of the Swiss cultural landscape is the simultaneous appreciation of archaic artifacts and customs and the influence of the avant-garde and the Bauhaus, as implemented in the special case of Concrete art, design, and typography.”<sup>47</sup> The appropriation of the hardware store logo gives this diversity of registers to the text's insertion into the exhibition, its presence pointing to the complex interrelationships of cultural capital, itself so often appropriated and mobilized for neoliberal ends.

The photography of Collier is, of the three examples, most directly engaged with the legacy of Crimp's *Pictures* exhibition. Described as “pictures of pictures,” the works often echo works from the *Pictures* exhibition, through their photographic decontextualizations of found printed matter from the 1970s and 1980s (generally photographed against white backgrounds in her studio), but also through the content of the depicted ephemera, which include record sleeves, advertisements, books, and magazine covers, occasionally portraying women photographers in particular.<sup>48</sup> Despite these affinities, Collier asserts, “I don't think of my work in terms of appropriation or re-photography, rather I think of them more as still-lives in that they are typically straightforward depictions of existing objects.”<sup>49</sup> Thus Collier evokes the legacy of appropriation even as she specifically distances her own work from its critique of authorship.

Collier's photographs nonetheless function as art-historical palimpsests, which layer the rephotography of Sherrie Levine with 1970s-era critiques of the

47. Tom Eccles, Beatrix Ruf, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Julia Peyton-Jones, foreword to Haim Steinbach, et al., *Object and Display*, exh. cat. (New York: Gregory R. Miller, 2015), 358–59.

48. Bob Nickas, “Anne Collier with Bob Nickas,” in Anne Collier, Jan Verwoert, and Bob Nickas, *Anne Collier*, exh. cat. (North Vancouver, BC: Presentation House Gallery, 2008), 13.

49. Ibid.

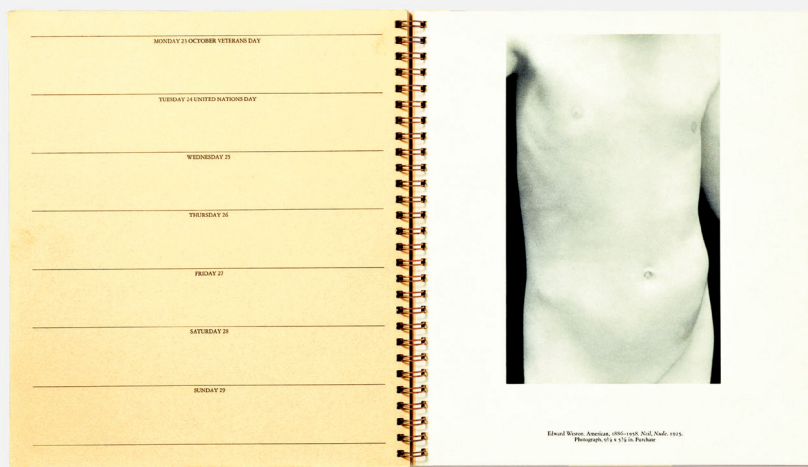


**Haim Steinbach, *bauhaus*, 2014**, found text in red vinyl on wall, 26 in. x 13 ft. 2 in. (66 x 401.3 cm), installation view, Kunsthalle Zurich, 2014 (artwork © Haim Steinbach; photograph by Stefan Altenburger; provided by Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York)

50. Chrissie Iles, "Anne Collier: Once More, with Feeling," in Michael Darling and Chrissie Iles, *Anne Collier*, exh. cat. (Chicago: Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, 2014), 22.

gaze and a nostalgic regard for artifacts of the Pictures era. For example, Collier's body of work *Woman With a Camera* (begun in 2006) presents a variety of found photographs of women's faces or bodies depicted behind cameras, sometimes posed as if the images were made by shooting self-portraits in a mirror. Collier presents these simulated selfies, which situate "the camera as both a tool in the construction of female vulnerability and a means by which to overcome it," contextualized in the formats in which they were first disseminated (a postcard presented as a diptych showing its front and back sides, an image of Marilyn Monroe depicted in the open spread of a post-it-note-marked monograph, and so forth).<sup>50</sup> Many of these photos include text as part of the overall image ("CON-TAX RTS. RTS SPELLS S-E-X," assures one article's copy, written across a reclining female nude in Collier's *Woman With Cameras #1*, from 2012), and it is the recontextualizing of the taglines into the social and political milieu of the twenty-first century that renders Collier's photographs unequivocally absurd.

While Collier's photographs often engage text to explore such archetypes of femininity and the politics of image construction, she also uses the found text in



**Anne Collier, *Veterans Day (Nudes, 1972 Appointment Calendar, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Edward Weston)*, 2011**, C-print, 50 3/4 x 64 5/8 in. (128.9 x 164.1 cm) (artwork © Anne Collier; photograph provided by Anton Kern Gallery, New York)

her photographs as a form of institutional critique, using art-historical references appearing in “vernacular manifestations of photographic imagery” to point to the means of contemporary image circulation.<sup>51</sup> Collier’s *Veterans Day (Nudes, 1972 Appointment Calendar, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Edward Weston)* (2011) depicts a 1972 weekly datebook reprinting the same Weston nude that Levine rephotographed in 1979 as part of her *After Edward Weston* series. In 1980, Crimp described the Levine work this way:

At a recent exhibition, Levine showed six photographs of a nude youth. They were simply rephotographed from the famous series by Edward Weston of his young son Neil, available to Levine as a poster published by the Witkin Gallery. According to the copyright law, the images belong to Weston, or now the Weston Estate. I think, to be fair, however, we might just as well give them to Praxiteles, for if it is the *image* that can be owned, then surely these belong to classical sculpture, which would put them in the public domain. . . . Representation takes place because it is always already there in the world as representation. It was, of course, Weston himself who said that “the photograph must be visualized in full before the exposure is made.” Levine has taken the master at his word.<sup>52</sup>

51. Nickas, 13.

52. Douglas Crimp, “The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism,” *October* 15 (1980): 98–99.



Thus Collier, depicting Weston's nude in a reproduction that predates Levine's own appropriation, inserts herself anachronistically within this chronology of copies, both in the moment of 1972, appropriating Weston seven years before Levine's rephotography of Weston-marketing ephemera, and also in the year 2011 when Collier takes her image, executing a double (or triple) appropriation of Levine via Weston (via Praxiteles). It is Collier's reproduction of this image in a calendar, itself a textual frame for capturing and representing time, that highlights the chronologically jumbled way in which images circulate today, alluding to the commercialization of art imagery that enables these anachronic readings in the first place, curating and disseminating work by promotional potential rather than art-historical logic.

Pictures, and Crimp's work on the subject, has been influential in beginning to understand how images like these function in the postmodern landscape because, as Crimp explains in his memoir *Before Pictures*, "Pictures has come to stand less for a small exhibition at Artists Space than for an artistic tendency. . . . Pictures is a signifier—even a floating signifier."<sup>53</sup> One indication of this broad applicability and importance of his writing on appropriation is the sheer number of rereadings and revisions of his ideas, both by himself and others. While Crimp has acknowledged that "much would be made of the shifts" in his essays on the topic over time, these appropriations are, in fact, the imperative of appropriation.<sup>54</sup> Johanna Burton writes: "In order to resist the cultural riptides, one needs to plot (however tangentially) one's own longitude and latitude within them. The notion may have been best articulated by Hal Foster in 1982, when he asserted that this approach to culture suggested a model wherein artists treated 'the public space, social representation or artistic language in which he or she intervenes as both a target and a weapon.'"<sup>55</sup> Today, such interventions necessarily recognize not only that the circulation of images maps power dynamics across culture, but that images are just one vector of many, in a field of representations more varied than Crimp's writings about appropriation acknowledge. Artists still use appropriation "to expose that system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting, or invalidating others," but we increasingly engage a diversity of representations (textual or otherwise) in the service of a diversity of political positions concerned with manifestations of control (in print, in performance, in legislation, in alliances, in histories, in art practice, and so on).<sup>56</sup> These contemporary appropriations identify some of the dense network of associations called upon, both explicitly and implicitly, by the variety of representations that occupy the contemporary landscape, reading them again, to understand how they operate, and operate on us.

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53. Crimp, *Before Pictures*, 275.

54. Crimp, *Diss-Co*, 23, rep. Crimp, *Before Pictures*, 199.

55. Burton, 261.

56. Owens, "Discourse," 68.